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RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 3843  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 1661  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 1528  
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL PRIORITY 2097  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0770  
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY  
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 2567  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
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SENSITIVE  
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [TX](#)  
SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: BOUCHER MEETS OFFICIALS ON  
DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND EDUCATION

REF: A. A. 2007 ASHGABAT 0885  
[1](#)B. B. ASHGABAT 0647  
[1](#)C. C. ASHGABAT 0206

[1](#)1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

[1](#)2. (SBU) SUMMARY: On May 28, Assistant Secretary Richard Boucher had separate meetings focusing on Democracy/Human Rights and Education. In the meeting with the Institute for Democracy and Human Rights, Institute Director Shirin Akhmedova detailed the Institute's role in helping Turkmenistan to meet its international human rights obligations and its many projects with international partners. She said the Institute is working closely with the parliament on constitutional reform and preparation of the December 2008 parliamentary elections. Akhmedova said the Central Election Commission has authorized Institute personnel to monitor elections around the country. The meeting with Deputy Chairman for Education, Health, and Science Hydyr Saparlyev and Education Minister Muhammetgeldi Annaamanov focused on both basic and higher education. Saparlyev spoke positively about blossoming cooperation with Columbia University and Texas A&M University. He was noncommittal about the Turkmenistan adopting a "Bolashak-type" program, saying it was "one option." END SUMMARY.

[1](#)3. (SBU) On May 28, Assistant Secretary Richard Boucher met with Shirin Akhmedova, Director of the Institute for Democracy and Human Rights. Akhmedova described the Institute's structure, goals and mission, and noted its key role in the reform process now underway in Turkmenistan. With the Institute's guidance and participation, the government established the Human Rights Commission in August 2007 (ref A), the State Commission on Legislative Reform in November 2007 and the Constitutional Commission in April [1](#)2008. The Institute also was continuing to work closely with the parliament on issues such as reform of the family code, preparation for the December 2008 parliamentary elections, and revision of the constitution.

MANY INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

14. (SBU) Akhmedova underscored the Institute's central role in making sure Turkmenistan meets its international human rights commitments and talked about the many projects it is doing with international partners (Ref B). The UN Development Program is helping them develop a reporting capacity, and United Nations Children's Fund is helping them reform the juvenile justice system. Another project with the UN that will begin in October 2008 will be designed to strengthen the country's capacity to protect human rights. She also described the Institute's work with EU/TACIS, to include a recently completed commercial arbitration seminar. She also described cooperation with USAID (Ref C), to include work revising legislation on non-governmental organizations, legal regulation of the media (through Internews Network), and reform of the religion law. She also mentioned that ABA/CEELI was continuing to work with the Institute on a project to improve computer literacy for institute staff, and along with the UN, was developing an international legal resource center at the Institute.

15. (SBU) Assistant Secretary Boucher noted the wide variety of international partners, and asked if the Institute worked with any international human rights organizations. Akhmedova said the Institute had not worked with any of them, since it had not received any concrete proposals for cooperation from them. She did, however, describe an invitation she and other government officials had received from the British embassy for a human rights-related study trip to London July 5-12 that is to include meetings with human rights organization representatives. she also noted one of her staff members was

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currently in the United States on an International Visitors Program focused on human rights.

#### PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS

16. (SBU) When asked about Turkmen non-governmental organizations, Akhmedova said there were about 200 such registered organizations operating in Turkmenistan that engage in issues related to human rights and social welfare. Representatives of these groups are invited to many Institute-sponsored events. As an example, she noted the Institute's work with a society for disabled citizens, which is assisting it with fulfillment of Turkmenistan's obligations regarding the UN Convention on the Disabled.

#### ELECTION REFORM

17. (SBU) The Institute holds national election observer status, and the Central Election Commission has authorized Institute personnel to monitor elections around the country. When asked about the direction in which the Institute wants to focus electoral reform, Akhmedova said the focus was upward, toward senior levels of government. The Institute is working with UN Development Program on a project designed to build capacity within the Central Election Commission, and the EU is sponsoring additional work. Akhmedova added that the revised constitution will also introduce numerous changes to the electoral process.

#### BASIC EDUCATION

18. (SBU) The meeting with Deputy Chairman for Education, Health, and Science Hydyr Saparlyev and Education Minister Muhammetgeldi Annaamanov on May 28 was cordial. Saparlyev detailed plans for building new schools and outfitting them with computers. He also emphasized efforts to modernize the curricula for schools and update textbooks, reduce teacher's workloads and classroom sizes. Saparlyev said curriculum development was an ongoing process that required frequent updates. Saparlyev had little comment when Boucher raised curricula reform, writing of new textbooks, and the "one laptop per child" program. When Boucher mentioned the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study program

sponsored by USAID, Saparlyev said the government was reviewing and examining their teaching of various subjects.

#### HIGHER EDUCATION

¶9. (SBU) Regarding the subject of a possible government scholarship program, Saparlyev noted that it was one option and cited the examples of foreign companies or programs that take students to Russia, Turkey, China, and other countries. He estimated that there are 5,000 slots available for students in Turkmen Universities, with plans to expand to 50,000 in the coming years.

¶10. (SBU) Saparlyev spoke in positive terms regarding developing cooperation with Columbia University or Texas A&M University. He admitted, however, that the government needed to recognize degrees from private universities in the region (American University of Central Asia and Kazakhstan's International Management, Economics and Strategic Planning University) - a small but significant signal that the government is not automatically against such programs.

¶11. (SBU) Saparlyev expressed his appreciation for Assistant Secretary Boucher's emphasis on education. He also explained that the government of Turkmenistan would examine any proposals in education "with pleasure."

¶12. (SBU) COMMENT: The Institute for Democracy and Human Rights' energetic director showed why so many international partners are willing to work with her. Enthusiastic about

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her organization's role and the possibilities, she is one of the most forward leaning of Turkmen officials. While Saparlyev was quite supportive of educational exchanges, he was non-committal on a "Bolashak-type" program. In addition, he was not overly enthusiastic to the idea of cooperation on some areas of basic education. END COMMENT.

¶13. (U) Assistant Secretary Boucher has cleared this cable.  
HOAGLAND